

THE BAPTISTS OF EPSOM TOWN

(EPSOM BAPTIST CHURCH – 1900 to 2000)

by
David Jenkins

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CHAPTER 1: THE BEGINNING.

It seems that it all began sometime in late 1898 or early 1899 as a Committee was formed in April 1899 to be responsible for the inauguration of the Baptist Church. It was presumably this Committee who, from the beginning of October 1899, arranged for advertisements and posters to appear with the heading, "A BAPTIST CHURCH FOR EPSOM!". By that stage a legal agreement had been entered into to rent the Gymnasium Hall in the Parade for a period of eighteen months from the previous Christmas and a plot of ground in Hook Road had been purchased with a view to building a place of worship of their own. These facts come from what appears to be an extract from the first edition of a monthly magazine which was probably published very late in 1899. 250 copies were to be produced and distributed free. In addition to all this, an organ, chairs, hymnbooks etc. had all been purchased and fully paid for at a cost of some £70. To put this into perspective, accounts to 31st December 1899 show 'Sunday Collections to date: £11.13s. 2d' and a total income of £82. 7s. 6d. Presumably these were figures for a year but I cannot be sure.

Obviously they had stepped out in faith.

The next milestone, and the one the Church is now celebrating, is the formal formation of Epsom Baptist Church. So far, this had been a dream but no doubt a dream from God. On the evening of Sunday April 8th 1900 a special meeting was held following the evening service at which the first steps were taken. This was presided over by Rev. AC. Hodgson of Kingston (the minister of the day) and at that meeting the Secretary, Arthur Staidwell, proposed the following resolution:

"That we, a number of Baptists residing in Epsom, Surrey, and the neighbourhood, organise a Baptist Church in this town, at as early date as can be conveniently arranged, and that the prospective members be requested to hand in their names, and to mutually arrange the date for the necessary Meeting to organise the proposed Church".

Two weeks later a further meeting was held, again after evening worship. On this occasion Rev Isaac Stalberg of Kingston presided and after prayer and praise the Secretary moved the all important resolution:

"That we hereby agree to form ourselves into a Christian Church which shall have as its essential condition of membership a sincere profession of 'repentance' towards God, and faith towards our 'Lord Jesus Christ', to be publicly witnessed by immersion into the name of the 'Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost', and evidenced by a godly life; and that, relying on Divine aid we now covenant with each other to faithfully fulfil all the duties of Church members as we shall discover them by a reverent study of the 'Word of God' ".

This resolution was seconded and carried unanimously and thus it would seem that in celebrating the Centenary in October the celebrations will be six months late.

When one thinks about what had already been achieved it is difficult to accept the fact that the original membership was only 19. I list the names because one or more may be recognised by one or more of those who read this:

Robert Boon, Lottie Bignall, Sarah Boothman, Jessie Boothman, H. T. Boothman, Louisa Etherington, Amelia Fox, Annie Lock, William Lock, Alfred Matthews, A G. Ozler, Richard Parkhouse, William Pearce, William Reeve, Ellen Sanders, H. W. Sanders, A H. Stockwell, Effie Turner, Sarah Ann Warner.

Five days later a further meeting was held in the Public Hall (the Gymnasium?) to 'recognise' the formation of the church.

As to the pastorate, it seems that sometime prior to March 1900 a John Tuckwell had been invited to take this position for a period of "at least three months". This invitation was accepted on 16th March. However at the Meeting on 22nd April when the Church was formed Rev A.C. Hodgson was invited to the pastorate for at least one year and as the required resolution was passed unanimously the privilege of being the first Pastor of Epsom Baptist falls to him.

The next little bit seems a little strange in that a meeting was held to formally take into the Fellowship the Committee formed in April 1899 but it does seem possible that they formed the first leadership team. It was not until the 1st January 1902 that Deacons were elected and held their first meeting. However, affairs moved much more quickly so far as involving children in the Church is concerned. My researches reveal that our predecessors were great ones for forming committees and one such body was instituted in September 1900 with a view to considering the formation of a Sunday School. As the School opened on the 4th November it seems that they were very decisive people who were willing to 'take the risk' in the Lord's name.

Opinion is divided in many churches as to whether it is necessary to have a book of rules at all, or, if there is such a thing, quite how detailed they should be. Obviously the early members of EBC felt such a need and the first rules were enshrined in black and white in November of that first year and came into force on 1st January 1901. They appear quite a bit longer than those in existence today but are really very similar. There is however one difference which seems to be of considerable significance, a Spiritual Church Meeting was to be held every three months. The purpose of such meetings was; "... for the social intercourse on the spiritual life, which every member be entitled to attend but when no formal business be transacted". Did they have something to teach the church of today?

By the end of 1900 things appear to have been going well, Rev Hodgson was confirmed, and agreed to continue, as Pastor, the Church was continuing to meet and worship at the Gymnasium and early in the new year it was reported that the membership had risen to 36 and that there were 32 children and 5 teachers in the Sunday School plus a further 20 in the Bible Class. An International Bible Reading Association Branch (IBRA) had been founded and had 53 adherents and the free distribution of the magazine previously mentioned had risen to 1000. That comparatively small group of Christians, with the Lord's help, achieved much in a very short time.

The question of premises always seems to have been a thorn in the side of Epsom Baptist Church. At the time of its formation it already owned a site in Hook Road although this was sold towards the end of 1900 for £225. In 1902 thoughts definitely turned to finding a permanent home, it seems that conditions at the Gymnasium were far from ideal. However, it was a number of years before there were any real developments. This was the basic reason behind the resignation of the Pastor which was received in January 1902, to take effect from 30th June. In his letter of resignation he states: " ... I do not consider that there is a prospect of the cause developing to any very material extent, either numerically or otherwise, while the church continues to assemble in the present obscure, dilapidated, and uninviting structure, which you have decided to do for at least another twelvemonth". The membership had, by this time, increased to 45 and the IBRA to 70 members of whom 20 were outside the Church. It seems therefore, that the Church was really quite successful.

Whilst much time must have been spent on their own internal affairs the important matter of reaching out to the town was not ignored, previously a Simultaneous Mission by the Epsom Free Churches had been proposed but found impracticable. Now, in 1902, the Congregational Church had made an approach with a view to forming a Free Church Council and also there was a proposal to hold monthly combined services involving the Baptists, the Congregationalists and the Weslyans. The first meeting of the Free Church Council took place later in the year. So far as EBC was concerned, Monday prayer meetings were under way, a building fund was started and the first of the Spiritual Church Meetings had taken place under the title, "The work of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers". Again, on the premises front, it was proposed to buy a piece of land at the corner of East Street and Hook Road for not more than £1500, borrowing 2/3 of the price on mortgage. Around this time there is the first mention of financial support for the BMS and in January 1903 the Church agreed to join the Baptist Union. This latter step appears to have been taken in order to be eligible for help from the Baptist Twentieth Century Fund towards the cost of a new building.

A smile came to the author's lips when he read that in June 1902 Mr. Hodges moved, "... that we use Sankey's hymnbook every Sunday evening for three months". Mr Harvey moved the amendment, "... that we do not use Sankey's hymns but retain 'Psalms and Hymns' ". The amendment was carried so, at least for the time being, the old order held fast. Reading on, however, it appears that in September that same year it was agreed that a few friends should gather each Sunday evening to try the new hymns and a year later they were given a three months trial. A final decision to adopt them, at least as an alternative, has not been found but it seems probable that in the end they were adopted as they were subject to several trial periods including one of a year and mention is also made of them being dispensed with.

It has already been seen that premises had been a cause of problems much as they have been in more recent times. The Building Fund Committee first met in February 1903 and even at this early stage it seems the Council were anxious to acquire a piece of the site which was indeed sold to them. By the following March plans for a new building were well under way, the intention at that time was to build a school hall first with the church building itself later on. Remember, this was all in Hook Road. The plans appear to have been ambitious in that the hall was to seat 300 at an estimated cost of not more than £1200 whilst the church was envisaged as seating 450. One imagines that all this future planning must have taken a considerable amount of time and energy. However outreach to the town seems to have continued as monthly special gospel Sunday services were instituted, to last one hour and with Sankey's hymns (despite, it seems, continuing reservations in some quarters). Prayer and praise obviously featured prominently in the life of the Church as in 1904 it was agreed that the devotional service preceding the Church Meeting be concluded at 8.30pm and that this be solely prayer and praise, without an address. "What time is it?" does not appear to have been a question frequently asked in those days.

1905 started with the drawing up of the Trust Deed, it seems that this was probably necessitated by the need to place matters on a more formal footing in view of the building plans. Sadly this step brought about the first recorded resignation from the diaconate. At this time the membership stood at 46. The Church had been without a pastor since the departure of Mr Hodgson

in 1902, this interregnum had come about as the result of a decision by the Church Meeting but in April of 1905 Mr R French was called to be Student Pastor from the first Sunday in April. It was in this year also that the possibility of exchanging the site in Hook Road for a site in Church Street was first mentioned. The exchange of sites took place during 1905 so it is in this year that EBC put down its roots in Church Street but obviously signs of what was to come were already in evidence. At one of the meetings it was reported that the Council wanted some of the land in connection with the widening of the road. It would be interesting to know whether widening has ever taken place, this matter raises its head once again later in the story. No doubt the final step in finding a suitable site for the church building was a great encouragement

By March 1906 the membership had increased to 60 and in the previous year 9 baptisms had taken place. It was in March that it appears a further decision was taken to continue with Sankey's hymns. Later it was resolved that for a period of four weeks the evening service be slightly amended in that it would last for about an hour and "... in its every part the outside public (that is those who are not publicly professed Christians) be specially catered for". The idea of this new effort was to win those for Christ who were not likely to attend the ordinary public worship. It is surely interesting that even in those early days there was a concern that the regular form of worship at the church did not reach out to the man in the street. As with the trust deed there was a downside too, it appears that this decision also may have brought about the resignation of one of the deacons. In this year there was also a complaint that there was too much handshaking on going out of the services. The year ended on a sad note in that the Pastor, Mr French, resigned. However, 1907 was a landmark year as the new building was opened in November and the membership rose to 71.

CHAPTER 2: TESTING TIMES.

Mr C.W. Townsend was called to the Pastorate and commenced his ministry on the first Sunday in August 1908 and by the second half of 1909 the membership was 95. Sadly, notwithstanding the apparent evidence of growth, all was not well and there appear to have been divisions within the fellowship concerning the Pastor. Mr Townsend resigned his leadership in February 1910 but the reasons are not altogether clear bearing in mind what had occurred in 1909. The church now appears to have been in financial difficulties as the giving was not meeting the expenses. In the end the parting appears to have been amicable and obviously the Church was now, in an earthly sense, leaderless.

Later in the year the situation becomes somewhat clearer in that it is stated that the Church was unable to pay for preachers on a Sunday so there appears to have been considerable difficulty. In addition, in the April a resolution of appreciation was passed concerning Mr Townsend, emphasising that his resignation had been accepted only because of the low weekly giving and the resulting state of the Church's finances. These difficulties continued, later in the year pressure was brought to bear to repay the loan from the bank and hardship appears to have been experienced in servicing the debt to the Baptist Building Fund. In these circumstances it was felt that it was impossible to consider calling a pastor. However, all was not gloom and despondency in that an "Open Air Work" was started in the April and a minute in July states that all friends were doing their best to help.

Despite the problems the membership seems to have remained loyal. As already stated, there were 71 members at the end of 1907, in 1908 it rose to 75, 90 in 1909 but reduced to 79 by the end of 1910. It was emphasised that the last figure, and presumably the earlier ones also, contained a number of none-active people. In the same vein, the Church was still publishing 400 copies of the magazine which it is assumed were being distributed around the Town.

It was towards the end of this year, 1910, that the Secretary of the Home Counties Baptist Association, Mr. Tarbox, was approached with a view to taking charge for a period of 6 I 12 months. Apparently he had offered to do so. One of the hopes was "to bring together any, at present, discordant elements in the membership". As with many churches there is fairly regular evidence of disruptive undercurrents throughout the life of EBC but considerable and often successful steps were taken to bring about the healing process. Whilst it is not made clear, I have assumed that the original intention was to appoint Mr Tarbox as Moderator but as early as January 1911 he was invited to become Pastor for an initial period, again 6 I 12 months, and he accepted at nominal remuneration. In the event, he was to remain until 1916 and whilst it is difficult to get a true feeling from documents such as committee minutes and open meeting minutes, I have the definite conviction that Epsom Baptist Church owes much to the dedication and hard work of this man.

It seems probable that the arrival of the new Pastor had an immediate and beneficial effect because as early as April the Financial Committee's efforts meant that the Church was almost free from debt in that the various arrears had been liquidated. No doubt as a consequence of what seems to have been achieved under the leadership of Mr Tarbox he was asked, in June, to remain until the end of the year and again, in November, to continue for a further twelve months to 31st December 1912. During this extended period progress seems to have continued in that the Band of Hope was revived in January, it appears that weekly 'Praise and Prayer' meetings were being held, the Young Peoples' Society was formed (for strictly religious and spiritual purposes!) and at the end of the year the Pastor was asked if he would continue in that post without time limit. He accepted.

The only significant fact to come out of 1913, so far as I could see, was the final repayment of the loan from the bank and the minute stating that only £100 was outstanding to the Baptist Building Fund. The financial position was obviously much improved and bearing in mind the situation when Mr Tarbox came on the scene the giving must have been sacrificial. I wonder whether, today, EBC could manage to build a new building and almost repay the resultant debt in so short a time. Obviously the sums involved were small by today's standards but then so were incomes.

In 1914 the Pastor was led to consider the question of outreach, how best to take 'The Word' to the people of the Town, and he floated the idea of opening a Mission Room in Pound Lane but it seems that nothing came of this scheme. It was back in 1901

that the first formalised rules came into force and in May of this year the Church felt led to simplify and revise them. There is not the space nor, I feel, the need to reproduce them in detail here but one or two points did strike me. It was confirmed that the Minister, Officers and Members should be baptised believers but the Lord's Table was open to all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ as their Saviour. It was stipulated that membership implied attendance at services and also the Lord's Table and that removal from the Church Roll should be considered after an absence of six months or more without good cause. I was also struck by the rules governing the Church Meetings, these were to be held monthly, there needed to be a quorum of 20% of the membership and no new business could be brought to those meetings without prior notice to the Officers.

As I approached this momentous year when of course the Great War began with all the death, injury and hardship that followed, I wondered what I would find. So far as I could see no mention was made of the outbreak of war and, indeed, throughout the next four years hardly any mention is made of that devastating conflict which was taking place not all that far away across the Channel. The life of the Church seems to have gone on much as before.

Dry rot, despite its name, is brought about by the presence of damp and over the last twenty years or so there have been, I understand, two outbreaks in the church building. It seems that damp was a quite early problem in the building as early in 1915 an estimate for £8 was obtained for the painting of the outside of the church building together with rough casting the rear wall due to the penetration of damp. There is no record as to whether this work was in fact carried out but damp penetration was again causing concern at the end of the year also.

In September 1915 final repayment of the debt to the Baptist Building Fund was achieved and a Thanksgiving Service was held to mark this milestone. There was another positive step forward at this time in that a Senior Christian Endeavour Society was formed. Here also is one of the few references to the war. Steps were taken, with other churches, to provide a meeting place for soldiers billeted in the Town but in the event there was no real need and the scheme did not proceed.

It seems that during this year the Pastor suffered ill health, the indications are that he was not a young man and in addition to his duties as Pastor he had, apparently, also been filling the post of Church Secretary. In November he tendered 3 months notice of his resignation emphasising that he had no grievances and was on good terms with both Officers and Members. He stated that the work was looking up after a period of depression but he felt he was not as young and as sharp as he once had been and he also had to take great care of his health. A Special Church Meeting was held and a strong vote of support was passed. In consequence the resignation was withdrawn subject to health considerations and Mr Tarbox's ministry continued.

1916 opened with yet another of the rare references to the War in that the decision was made to insure the church building against air raids. War risks are now excluded from such policies but it can only be assumed that this was not so in those days. The year, it seems, was not a happy one as the Pastor resigned in August in what appears to have been difficult circumstances due to a dispute between two members. The details are not recorded and in any event it would not be right to reproduce them here. It seems the Church was equally divided at a Special Church Meeting as to acceptance of Mr Tarbox's resignation but he subsequently confirmed his departure. He did however confirm that he had been happy at EBC and spoke of the harmony and peace he had enjoyed. It seems that his health played at least a part in his decision but it must have been a sad end to what had apparently been a fruitful period in the life of the Church. He expressed the wish to part on friendly terms with everybody.

The Deacons and Members did not 'let any grass grow under their feet' in their search for a new Pastor. Mr Bevan, a student at Pastors College, accepted the call in November to become a Student Pastor and commenced his ministry on 1st January 1917 at a stipend of 15 shillings i.e. 75p per week.

Whilst the reported event was a tragic one, the record of it brought a smile to my face and having been involved in the writing of minutes in the past I recognised a warning for the future. It seems that towards the end of 1916 one of the members appointed to audit the Church Accounts died and had to be replaced. The minute reads that he, " ... suffered a sad fatality from which he had died".

The New Year opened with yet another situation involving the War, the Army Authorities required all Divinity Students leaving college either to:

Join the army.

Give their time to relieve a minister who had been made a Chaplain to the Forces.

Join up and pass to the Reserve to await a Chaplaincy

Become a resident Minister.

Mr Bevan apparently indicated that he preferred the fourth option and to facilitate this the stipend was increased to £1 per week.

It has been difficult throughout my research to be sure that I have always got the story right and the following is just such an example. In September 1917 a social gathering was held at which Mr and Mrs Bevan were presented with a clock, ornaments and a table-cloth and Mr Bevan expressed his attachment to the Church and the people. Was this, perhaps, recognition of their wedding? I don't know. Sadly, Mr Bevan resigned at short notice in the November because of his ill health, although it seems he was taking another pastorate. This must have been a sad blow as the Church had only just lost its Secretary due to his being called up for military service.

Having had such a smooth period, except, perhaps, at the end of his ministry, the Church was saddened to learn of the death of Mr Tarbox in July of 1918 and a memorial was placed in the Church. How many of you realise that it is still there today? I didn't! In that same month the Rev Benson was called to the pastorate and duly accepted. He was inducted in the October but at that time was still living in Bow. Sadly, he died at his home in November thus bringing a sad end to the year.

1919 opened on a happier note, the Rev E. E. Peskett was called in March and commenced his ministry on 4th May. At the outset he seems to have expressed great hope for the future in that he foresaw the possible need for a larger building and pressed for provision to be made. It is not clear as to what steps, if any, were subsequently taken at that time. The arrival of Mr and Mrs Peskett gives a reminder of the fact that Membership was restricted to baptised believers. It seems that Mrs Peskett was an invalid and despite strong belief in the sacrament of the baptism of believers by immersion was unable to be baptised herself. To become a member she was required to produce a doctor's certificate, something, I hope, that would not happen today.

It appears that until now the Pastor had provided his own living accommodation but in September of 1919 the church felt led to consider buying a manse and eventually "Westfield", Bridge Road, was purchased. This property was owned for many years, as will be seen, but it is not very clear as to how many Pastors actually lived there as it seems to have been let on more than one occasion. The rent apparently helping to meet the mortgage repayments.

CHAPTER 3: BETWEEN THE WARS.

From time to time the question as to what can and cannot be done on church premises comes under discussion and quite often very different views on the matter become apparent. Even over the last 40 years or so, in my experience, some surprising bans have been upheld which some have had difficulty in coming to terms with. I am not necessarily referring to any such decisions at EBC. 1920 reveals such an occasion, it would be interesting, I think, to go back in time and talk over with the folk there the arguments used. It must be remembered that there was no Hall and all activities took place in the church building itself. The Christian Endeavour Society wished to hold a social and there was the question " ... of games being held in the Church". The Pastor felt this was a matter in which they should seek to know God's Will for there was much to be said on both sides of the question. On the one hand they desired to give offence to no-one and on the other they wanted to be in sympathy with young people and to avoid giving them the impression that the Christian religion was gloomy and stuffy. A sentiment that in some quarters of our faith still needs to be learned. In the end permission was granted but games could only be played in the open vestries.

Outreach, it seems, has always been something of a problem, there being considerable difficulty in motivating the Christians rather than the townsfolk. In this year of 1920 it is minuted that a planned open air service combined with other churches lapsed because of lack of interest when the time came.

As with outreach the question of the need for a commitment to prayer is a regular feature in the minutes and comes up again in 1921. In the April the young people formed the One by One Society the objects of which were "to encourage the prayer spirit especially for definite objects". I may be wrong but I take this to mean praying for particular things and not just general prayers. All too often, it seems, we are reluctant or afraid to open our heart to God and reveal to him our true desires and ambitions, even those that are specifically to his glory.

Already the Church Anniversary is held, on occasions, in October and this year, the 21st Year, the celebrations started on Sunday 2nd October with a Special Service of Prayer and Praise. That was not the end of it for this celebration was followed by the following:

Monday / Tuesday: Missionary Conference.

Wednesday: Afternoon service followed by tea followed by a Public Meeting.

Thursday: A Service of Songs.

Friday: A Social and Workers Conference.

Saturday: A Prayer and Praise Meeting.

How many of us, today, would be willing to give up a whole week to celebrate the Church Anniversary? Do we have something to learn about commitment?

The church was not afraid to become involved in controversial matters, it is reported that our Pastor together with other Ministers in the Town appeared before the licensing magistrates and successfully opposed an application for an extension to public house opening hours.

I have commented previously to the effect that it is difficult when reading minutes to get any sort of feeling as to the mood of the people at the time. Were they feeling buoyant and confident or did they feel that things were not as they should be? The 1920's have a good feeling, there appears to have been a willingness to look to the future and to plan for the future. Sadly, it is not quite so clear as to how ready folk were to become involved. One factor which strikes one about so much of the past, even those times when things seem to have become difficult and the going hard, there seem to have been quite regular baptismal services and hardly a month seems to have gone by when an application for membership has not been dealt with. Quite often a special Church Meeting was called, perhaps after a Sunday service, for just this purpose. A considerable contrast to today.

Once again, in 1923, the Pastor was led towards an Autumn Campaign to reach out to those not currently reached by the churches. To this end a committee consisting of two representatives from all the organisations ie Christian Endeavour, Women's Sunshine Hour, the Sunday School, together with the Deacons was formed but somewhat sadly there is no evidence to show whether or not the campaign went ahead, or, if it did, what results were seen. However, all must have been reasonably well as the Pastor, Mr Peskett, was asked to continue for a further five years.

Comment has already been made as to the celebration of the Church Anniversary in 1921 and a similar example is seen in 1924. Today when we celebrate Harvest Festival there is perhaps a small social on the Saturday evening, perhaps a special service on the Sunday morning with the usual turn out in the evening. In the year in question, however, the affair was much larger and had two specific aims, namely, personal re-dedication and a financial effort (in other words a thank offering). The celebrations started on Sunday October 5th. This was followed on the Monday by a Thanksgiving Service. On Tuesday there was a social gathering and the thank offering was taken up. On Wednesday the Choir held a music evening. On Thursday there was a Christian Endeavour Consecration and Youth Rally, with the week closing on Saturday with a service of Prayer and Praise. It must have involved quite a lot of effort and hard work.

There was still a debt outstanding on the Manse and special efforts were to be made to clear this liability.

I can remember that, as a young Christian back in the 1950's, we were encouraged to attend meetings of the United Nations Association and the church to which I belonged may well have been a member or associated in some way, I cannot recall. At that time the 2 World War was of course well remembered and the Cold War with its nuclear threat was always in the news. Back in the 20's there was not the equivalent of the Cold War but the Great War must still have been in almost everyone's mind and the League of Nations held most people's hopes for a peaceful future. It is not surprising then that church members were encouraged to become members of the League and at the same time the Church joined the World Alliance. The Church became a corporate member of the League of Nations towards the end of 1926.

Time and time again the need to reach out comes to the fore and again, in 1925, the Pastor felt led to hold special evangelical services but there is no record of how many took place or how successful they were. It is noticeable however that regular applications for membership were being considered.

Early in 1926 that periodic source of tension in the life of most churches came up for discussion, namely hymn books. It seems that the Church had been using "Psalms and Hymns", Sankey's hymn book had been dropped some years previously. In the May the Church Meeting agreed, apparently with reservations in some quarters, to adopt the Baptist Church Hymnal. The subject of prayer also came under the spotlight in this year when the Church agreed to participate in a week of prayer in conjunction with the Baptist Churches of Cheam, Sutton and Wallington. This was to be held in Sutton and each church would be responsible for a different evening. It was planned for the month of January. Plans were also laid for participation in the Home Counties Baptist Association Spiritual Campaign on Sunday 6th March 1927 and prayer meetings were to be held on the two previous Sundays and the day before.

Following the Spiritual Mission (Campaign) services the Pastor reported that there had been a most encouraging deepening of the Spiritual Life of the Church and the Deacons felt that then was the time (once again) to reach out to the outside public. To this end Evangelical Services were planned for early April, to take place over two days, and 2,000 handbills were printed, enveloped and addressed before distribution. Bearing in mind our own letter campaign of a year or two ago and the fact that we detected no tangible results therefrom it would have been interesting to know of their experience some 70 years before. Sadly no comments appear to have been recorded.

Having purchased new hymn books in the previous year it was now apparently felt that the provision of music should be considered and a fund was started with a view to buying a new organ. The young people's work appears to have been going well and towards the end of 1927 they were encouraged to remain after evening service. This proved a great success and may have become a regular feature. A League of Young Worshippers was formed in 1928 but there is no record of its aims and objectives.

The organ fund obviously grew quickly as in May 1928 it was agreed to buy a new instrument for £245. This was to be a two manual pipe organ and it was considered that its arrival would enhance the worship and attract more people to attend services. In the event this purchase did not proceed as the opportunity arose to purchase a second hand but superior instrument from St. George's Chapel, Windsor, at a total cost of £277. This instrument was obviously hand-pumped and the boys of the Bible Class were asked to form a rota to undertake this task Sunday by Sunday. Whether it was the case that the boys were reluctant or whether they proved unreliable I don't know but as early as August, only some weeks later, a 'Blower for the Organ' was appointed at a cost of 13 shillings (65p) per quarter plus extra payments for special services.

Harvest Festival once again spread over several days and the Deacons proposed that it be followed by a 'Mission for the Deepening of the Spiritual Life of the Church'. After discussion it seems that the following resolutions were passed but bearing in mind the title and apparent aims I find it difficult to appreciate their deep relevance.

'Amen' to be sung after all hymns.

The congregation to remain standing for the Benediction.

During prayer and the reading of Scripture the doors to be kept closed.

Notices to be placed on the doors asking visitors not to enter during prayer and the reading of Scripture.

During the Mission the Pastor planned to preach two sermons on 'Reverence in Worship'.

Sadly, once again, there is no indication as to what was experienced at and following these services but it seems that the possible need to replace the boiler did manifest itself.

The site then owned by the Church seems to have consisted of the part occupied by the church building together with the "car park" and the opportunity of either purchasing or renting the land behind the car park is mentioned for the first time. The widening of Church Street, which would entail loss of the church, is also mentioned again at this time. The matter of the land obviously developed quickly as the purchase of that plot measuring 130ft x 41 ft at the front and 49ft at the rear was completed early in 1929 at a cost of £140. This asset was placed in the name of the Baptist Property Board but the deeds of the original site remained in the names of independent trustees only one of whom was a Church Member. The decision was taken to transfer this title also to the Board but it was January 1930 before the necessary resolution was passed and the formalities took a considerable time thereafter.

During 1929 Mr. Peskett was approaching the end of his second term and was invited to continue until September 1930 but in the event he accepted a call to Broadstairs and his ministry ended with the services on Sunday 30th June 1929. Thus ended what appears to have been a happy and fruitful period in the life of EBC.

It may well have been the case that the outreach to children was not as successful as it had been. A conference involving the Deacons, the Officers and the teachers of the Sunday School was spoken of, its aim being to "unite to seek Spiritual help in gathering in of the children through the Junior Church or the Young Helpers League". It seems likely that it did not in fact take place. I have been struck by the willingness, over the years, to form committees etc but how often the snapshot I have been able to take appears to indicate little actual action. In this year of 1929 it was decided that the object of the Harvest Thank Offering would be a new boiler (does that sound familiar?) and this was indeed installed at a cost of £48-5s-0d whilst the outside of the Manse was painted for £10.

Again, we find that the interregnum was to be a short one as Mr A. G. Edgerton was called to the pastorate in October. His first Sunday was to be the second Sunday in February 1930 when the Church was celebrating the Church Anniversary. It seems, therefore, that these celebrations remained a movable feast between the months of February and October.

The first five years of the 1930's seem to have been a fairly quiet time in the life of Epsom Baptist but having written those words I can almost feel our forebears saying, "You should have been there!" It certainly was not a quiet time in political and, more particularly, financial circles. In 1930 the organ blower's pay was increased to the princely sum of £1 per quarter and it was agreed to start a "New Building Fund". It seems that over many years the Church had been receiving a grant towards the Pastor's stipend from the Sustentation Fund and in this same year it was decided to dispense with this assistance. The finances of the Church could not, therefore, have been causing concern.

Over the next few years the work appears to have remained quite active, there were many comings and goings amongst the membership together with deletions. In those times they appear to have been quite strict in their dealings with members who ceased to attend. In reading the minutes of the Church Meetings I was struck by the fact that hardly a meeting went by when the membership was not considered in one form or another. In 1934 the Pastor felt led towards the holding of revival services in the autumn but once again nothing further is recorded. However from that time on even the organ blower could join in the singing of the hymns as an electric blower was installed.

Over the last twenty years or more the threat of the Relief Road has to an extent blighted the life of the Church in that it has brought about a feeling of uncertainty. In the 1930's it was the widening of Church Street and this matter once again raised its head in 1934. Would the Church have been more settled had it stayed on its original site in Hook Road? We shall never know.

1935 opened with the Pastor being invited to continue for a further year, his original five year term was drawing to a close. He apparently accepted. You will remember that a New Building Fund was started back in 1930 and the suggestion was now made that consideration be given to building Sunday School premises although it was sometime before this was taken very far. Outreach again comes under the spotlight for in the April it seems that a conference was held " ... on the subject of increasing the membership by personal influence and the need for Tract distribution and Evangelical effort in the streets. Young people and others were to be found in doorways of shops and houses in the thoroughfares of the Town". This conference is described as having been "pleasant and profitable". The question must be asked as to how many of us today would contemplate going out on Epsom High Street on a Saturday night to offer tracts or to speak for Jesus? We don't, of course, know what action was taken then.

In January 1936 when the membership stood at 90 the Pastor offered his resignation. He is reported as saying that he had no objection to carrying on but he thought a greater pioneer than himself should be appointed but left himself in the hands of the Church. In the event he did in fact resign, it seems that opinions were divided but the resignation was accepted with an expression of regret. The evidence is that Mr Edgerton was not a young man and that he indeed retired from the Ministry. His last service took place on the last Sunday in June.

My researches now became a little more difficult as for a period the minutes become less frequent and even less detailed.

In November 1936 Rev H.T. Barrow accepted the call to the Pastorate and it was about this time that the Open Air Mission made their first recorded visit to EBC for The Derby. The question of the road widening became more pressing in 1937 when it was resolved that urgent steps be taken towards building the new hall although serious thought appears to have been given to the alternative of selling up and moving elsewhere in the Town. Some of the older folk among you will remember Arthur Hodges

who was very involved with premises matters at this time. I knew him well through the Rotary Club of Ewell of which he was a founder member and I can remember him saying that it was a matter of regret to him that EBC felt unable to spend money on premises in the late 1930's because of the blight caused by the road scheme. I wish he was still here now as it would have been interesting, I think, to hear more of his memories. 1937 closed with the purchase of the New and Revised Baptist Hymnal so it seems that they were quite keen to keep up-to-date with the music side of their worship.

By January 1938 the Pastor had been in post for around twelve months and it is good to read that at that stage he was able to report that 30 new members had been received in during his ministry and the membership again stood at 90. It was in this year that Neville Chamberlain came from his meeting with Adolph Hitler waving the piece of paper and declaring, "Peace in our time". There is no report of this in the archives but it is noted that the war scare delayed the building plans. Despite all the uncertainty, planning still continued and, in fact, by July 1939 the Building Committee were seeking estimates.

At some time in the not too distant past it seems that a number of members had broken away and joined, or even formed, the Evangelical Church in Epsom. Considerable efforts were made over a lengthy period of time to bring about a re-unification but sadly this came to nought.

1939 came to a somewhat sad end as of course war with Germany was declared, following which it was felt necessary to change the service times, and the financial situation started causing great concern as it appears the Church was living beyond its means. In retrospect one wonders why the healthy situation reported two years previously changed in such a comparatively short time. As part of the economy measures the magazine order was reduced from 1250 copies to 1000 copies, part of the costs were covered by advertising revenue. I have had difficulty in following the story of the magazine with any certainty but it does seem likely that throughout most of the life of the Church, thus far, a regular publication has been produced and distributed free around the Town in varying numbers.

CHAPTER 4: THE WAR YEARS AND BEYOND.

Over the next few years there is little mention of the impact of the war on the lives of the members of the Church and congregation but in early 1940 it is reported that 'gifts and comforts' had been sent to soldiers, presumably those associated with EBC who were serving in the forces. The Building Committee too, was wound up for the duration of hostilities. Sadly, it seems that hostility was not confined to the war front as divisions between Minister and Deacons came to a head and Mr Barrow resigned after the Deacons received a very narrow majority at a Special Church Meeting called to consider a vote of confidence. It all proved very divisive. In view of the situation a planned Autumn Evangelistic Campaign was cancelled.

The end of 1940 did of course see the Battle of Britain and the air raids on London. Arrangements had apparently been made for the congregation to use the shelter at the police garage adjoining the church and all week-night activities were cancelled because of the raids. Despite all the difficulties it still proved possible to continue with the magazine. In 1941 it became possible to insure the contents of the church against war risks under the Governments War Risk Compensation Scheme and this was done in the sum of £300 at a cost of 30/- %

Notwithstanding the problems in the previous year the Lord's work continued. Although no nominations were forthcoming in the February for a vacancy on the Diaconate it was possible to start a new work amongst the young people when the Young Peoples Own opened. For many years the Church had been using offertory envelopes and in mid-1941 it was agreed to dedicate the loose offering on one Sunday to the BU War Emergency Fund (for damaged churches) and also, later, to hold a special collection. Support for this cause did become a monthly event. The Church also gave some support to the Lord Mayor of London's Air Raid Relief Fund.

1941 ended on a much happier note than did 1940. Rev F.C. White accepted the call to the Pastorate in the September and commenced his ministry on Sunday 2nd November.

No doubt times continued to be difficult but the Christian Witness in the Town continued and EBC played its part. Early in the year the Ministers' Fraternal arranged for the opening of a Christian Literature Stall in the Epsom Market on Saturdays and the Baptists apparently played their part in this. After Church Meetings for troops in the Town were also commenced.

I think I have commented previously on the fact that some things come up more than once in the life of institutions such as a church. Speaking from my own experience in other churches, particularly in the past when there were coke-fired boilers, heating has often been a cause of concern and sometimes friction. Bearing in mind the fact that we are currently looking at a period of great shortages in both food and fuel one would have thought that the lack of coke would be the reason for any 'cold' Sundays, but no. In February 1942 it was admitted that the lack of warmth was due to "the apparent failure to understand the method of stoking the boiler" We should be duly grateful for gas boilers and the need only to understand some simple electrical switches and a time clock.

Christian Outreach to the town of Epsom continued and it was in the second half of 1942 that the Epsom Council of Christian Churches was formed This appears to have been in addition to the Epsom Evangelical Council which already existed. The latter body organised a week of prayer in December in which the Baptists took their part. Sadly, the printer who had been printing the long running 'Messenger' ceased business and publication ceased. It was however agreed to continue a newsletter under the title 'Monthly Broadcast' at a cost of 35/- per month.

As 1943 started the country was just about halfway through the war years and whilst the life of the Church appears to have continued as normally as possible the effect of the shortages and problems are seen in the records of this period. In the January it is reported that parcels had once again been sent to those known to the Church who were serving in the forces. It seems too, that there were two committees in being, one to consider the needs of those in the forces who were stationed in and around Epsom and the other to care for the serving folk from the Church. Another problem caused by the war was the difficulty in heating the premises, it is noted that fuel shortages were causing the church to be cold.

I commented right at the beginning that the Church Anniversary was celebrated early in the year and although the celebrations appear to be a movable feast, in 1943 they took place in April.

1944 saw the Allied Landings in Normandy which must have been a great encouragement to the whole nation but the year also brought the threat of the V1 flying bombs and the V2 rockets. Normal bombing raids, I believe, also took place from time to time. The minutes reflect these continuing threats in several places. In March 1944 the Deacons' Meeting was interrupted by an air-raid, in July the Manse which was still let to the longstanding tenant was slightly damaged and an evangelical campaign proposed for the autumn was cancelled in view of "continuing enemy action". A Witness Weekend was, however, arranged in its stead. July also sees a report that most of the children had been evacuated.

However, all was not doom and gloom because, as previously mentioned, the Second Front was launched in June with D-Day. The Church played the only part it could in that in a time of crisis when many thousands of lives were at risk on and around the beaches of Normandy it turned to the Lord in prayer. This had been decided on beforehand and it seems that on D-Day itself Epsom Baptist Church gathered in prayer and did so on each of the next three days.

On a less happy note, but I suspect it reflects beliefs and attitudes of the times, the Church declined to support the Soldiers, Sailors and Airmens Families Association and also Princess Elizabeth's Day. It seems that the decision regarding the former was because it was purely secular in nature whilst the latter was because the appeal included a Roman Catholic orphanage. Thankfully, I think it unlikely that the same decisions would be made today.

The year of 1945 saw the coming of peace although, strangely, it does not appear to have been recorded in the Church Records. There is an air of optimism right from the start of the year, in January plans are formulated to start a branch of the Sunday School in the school in Pound Lane and later in the year it is decided to open both a Boy's Brigade Company and a Girl's Life Brigade Company. September saw applications from between 30 and 40 boys to join the BB but the GLB was in abeyance due to the difficulty in finding leaders.

For many years, linked, I assume, to the Church's hope and wish to rebuild in some way, a dispute had been on-going between EBC and Woodcote Motor Co. regarding their claim to 'Ancient lights'. I suspect that this must have involved the Church in a certain amount of expense and worry but our neighbours at last acknowledged that no such right existed.

Relationships with both the Congregationalists and the Methodists appear to have been good in that it was agreed to hold an annual united Communion Service and also the possibility of holding a united week of prayer was to be investigated. Certainly more than one Communion Service was held but I don't know about the weeks of prayer.

By the time that 1946 appeared the War was a thing of the past even though its effects were to be felt throughout the country and the world for many years to come. However, in the Church we all love, the Spirit seems to have started to move. Agreement was given to participation in the LBA Campaign for 1946/47 which would involve the following:-

- Open Air Group Witness

- Internal Church Mission for Church Members.

- An Evangelistic Mission.

- An Area interchange of pulpits planned for between June 46 and February 47.

On the premises front it was agreed to construct a wooden hut on part of the site at a cost of some £700 but this scheme soon ran into difficulties with the Council and although these were eventually overcome even greater problems arose over the granting of the necessary building licence. As an aftermath of the War new building of any description was closely controlled.

All at EBC in 1999 were delighted when new windows were installed to replace those that had long since served their duty. One of the theories put forward for their parlous state was that they had suffered damage from enemy action. Whilst it is reported that the Manse was damaged by bomb blast at no stage could I find reference to damage to the church building. It seems likely, therefore, that the problem arose purely by virtue of old age.

Did horse racing continue during the War? I don't know the answer to that question but in June 1946 the Open Air Mission were back in June to attend The Derby.

All was not sweetness and light during the year as a serious dispute took place over attitudes towards young people. The Deacons were accused of being unhelpful and unsympathetic and although this was initially rejected the problem seems to have festered. The Minister then felt that he was accused of turning the young people against the Deacons and at one stage the entire Diaconate resigned although this was later withdrawn. By November bridges seem to have been rebuilt and although the plans for 'outreach' were cancelled matters seem to have settled down once again. Where the will exists the Holy Spirit can work in the hearts of people and even the deepest rifts can be healed.

In January 1946 the decision was apparently made not to contribute to the BU Victory Thanksgiving Fund because of our own "rebuilding needs". However, in April 1947 a collection was taken up for the Bombed Churches Fund and later in the year the commitment was made to contribute a total of £100 by the end of 1948. These monies were to be raised by the holding of a musical evening at which there would also be a second-hand book stall, a Christmas present stall and 1 or a special Sunday. The needs of others were not forgotten.

April 1948 saw the holding of a Children's Mission, the Pound Lane Sunday School was still running and would continue for years to come. It is reported that this Mission was a great success with an average weeknight attendance of 73. 26 children made some form of commitment either by card or by letter. Christian Endeavour had been started in 1942 and ran for many years helping many young Christians to develop their faith. As a result of the Mission a Junior Christian Endeavour was started and 18 joined the Junior Scripture Union. The uniformed organisations were not being so successful. It seems that the Boy's Brigade Company had probably closed by this time but Life Boys was still meeting. The Girl's Life Brigade never, it seems, got off the ground.

The Pastor, Mr White, tendered his resignation in March 1949 and his farewell meeting took place on 1st October. Notwithstanding this, he must have taken something of a back seat as a Moderator was appointed in May. October also saw efforts to re-open the Boys Brigade Company but these, it seems, met with only limited success as in March 1950 it once again closed as did the Life Boys. The latter closure was due to lack of numbers. 1949 also saw thoughts turning towards the need for a new church building but it was felt that the present site was not suitable.

The early weeks of 1950 saw reports of difficulties not only in the uniformed organisations but also in the Sunday School. An appeal for prayer was made in the February as Pound Lane stood in need of 5 more teachers and due to the staff shortages older scholars were being lost. Whether or not those prayers were answered is not clear from the records but certainly prayers for the pastorate were. In March 1950 Mr E. J. Sharpe accepted the call and he commenced his ministry in the May. Mr Sharpe was not ordained and throughout his period at EBC he was on a part-time basis. However, the records show that he never spared himself in his efforts. One of the first milestones in his time in Epsom and also in the life of the Church was the Jubilee Celebrations in October. These took the form of a social on the Saturday to which previous pastors, friends and members were invited, special services on the Sunday to which the Mayor came and a devotional gathering on the Monday at which a thank offering was taken up to be devoted to redecoration of the church, electrical work, new hymn books, a new piano etc.

1951 seems to have been a year of consolidation during which the need for a second building (still a wooden hut) was further discussed. In fact premises seem to have been much in mind as the possible installation of a gas boiler was given thought together with possible re-wiring, general cleaning and maintenance. The fact that the electric supply was DC must have been an added complication. So far as the second building is concerned consideration went far beyond talk alone, the hut became a hall of solid construction and the plans were approved by the Church in April 1952 at an approximate cost of £3,500. In October an estimate of £3,828 was accepted, construction commenced in January 1953 and the new Hall was opened in October 1953.

Over the years, Epsom Baptist Church has seen several of its members enter into our Lord's service on a fulltime basis. Returning briefly to 1952, April saw Kenneth Welford who still preaches at Epsom from time to time accepted as a student at Spurgeon's College. On a completely different note, that year also saw the Pastor expressing his concerns in the following way.

"The Pastor mentioned in kindness and love the particular need of reverence and worship. It was appreciated that a deeper sense of worship was essential and special attention should be given to conversation before and after service also to the apparent disturbance between the two services on Communion Sundays".

It will be remembered that in those days the main service and the Communion service were two separate entities.

As already stated, construction of the new hall was started very early in 1953 so at long last progress was being made on the premises front after so many delays and difficulties over many years. The Church also revised the Rules and membership became available to Christians who had not been baptised as believers but that requirement remained for deacons and ministers as it does today. Also in 1953 another member answered God's call to fulltime work, for in April Robert Cooper took up the pastorate at Westbourne Park Baptist Church. Prior to this John Nainby had gone for training at Regents Park College.

Mr Sharpe was always Pastor on a part-time basis whilst running his own accountancy practice and it is obvious that at times the strain took its effect. At this time it was necessary for him to take two months leave of absence on health grounds, a rest that seems to have been wholly successful as he was able to return later in the year. Upon his return he reminded the Church that it depends on the power of prayer and stated that the prayer life of the Church had declined over the previous twelve months. He called on people to pray.

In the autumn of 1953 there was a special recruitment campaign on behalf of the Sunday School and 1,000 leaflets were prepared for distribution. Because of this it was anticipated that further help would be needed to augment the existing staff of twenty teachers. It was hoped that it would be possible to arrange week-night activities in addition to the Sunday meetings.

In preparation for the new hall a set of rules was drawn up for its use one of which was "No dancing of any kind". The Hall was opened on the 3rd October and in November the Pastor again urged members to pray but also to give systematically and to have confidence in "the Hand who has led us so far and will continue to do so".

I have commented before that when I have come to the conclusion that EBC has passed through a quiet period it is quite likely that that was far from the case. However I find little to comment on for the next two years apart from the following.

In May 1954 strong opposition was voiced to the broadcast of the 'Romish Mass' in the previous January. This had apparently lasted for 1 hour and 40 minutes. In addition it was apparently planned to broadcast the forthcoming canonisation of Pope Pius X and this too caused great consternation. How times have changed! Again on the ecumenical front, the Evangelical Church approached EBC for help in swelling their numbers but it was not, in the event, felt that we could assist.

The practice of appointing the Minister for a limited period was still being followed and in 1955 Mr Sharpe was invited to continue but this time without time limit. It is reported that the debt on the Hall was cleared and that the magazine, 'Broadcast', started during the war was still being published. The Church still owned the Manse in Bridge Road although the Pastor did not live there. It was still let to a long standing tenant who now offered to buy the property for £800 but this was declined.

For most of the time the Church has occupied the site in Church Street at least a portion of it appears to have been under threat from various road schemes and early in 1956 the question of road widening again came to the fore. However the Council seem to have given an assurance that nothing was likely to happen for at least five years. Again, on the premises front, plans were being formulated to extend the Hall but it would be almost a year before these were submitted to the planning authorities. I was rather amused to read that Mr Sharpe purchased a 'converter' but this had an electrical application rather than a spiritual one. The electricity supply was still DC and this piece of equipment was obtained to enable the Pastor to play gramophone records at evening service.

The 7th December must have been a wonderful day in the life of Mr and Mrs Sharpe and also of the Church as a valedictory meeting took place for the impending departure of Ian Sharpe and his wife for the mission field in the Congo. As many of you will know their work was to eventually end in tragedy when both they and their children were to die at the hands of rebels in that land.

I remind you that as far back as 1920 Mr Peskett, the Pastor, pleaded that the young people should not be given the impression that the Christian religion is gloomy and stiff. In this light, it is sad that in line with the rules for the use of the Hall mentioned earlier, a request from the YPF to have dancing from time to time was not approved. The full request was for more facilities to include dancing. What the decision was regarding any other aspects is not recorded. Whilst we are talking of 40 years ago one does have to ask oneself whether, had attitudes been a little different then and in future years, we would still have a 'work' amongst the young other than the very precious Adventurers of today.

1958 saw the granting of planning permission for the Hall extension and work soon got under way. This project was carried through by church members and friends on a DIY basis and we therefore owe them a tremendous debt. Some of those involved are still with us today. The year is not only noteworthy of comment because of premises but also because of the plans made for 'outreach'. The LBA had put forward plans for a campaign under the banner 'ALIVE WITH GOD' and EBC took the decision to play their part at a Special Church Meeting in the November. This commitment would involve special training and the contacting and visiting of around 400 homes.

The New Year opened with the report that the Church finances were on a sound footing and also that the road widening threat was still only a paper one. Towards the end of the year, with work on the Hall almost complete, thoughts turned to improving the church building itself due to its drab appearance and the increase seen in the congregations. During the summer a boy's camp had been held and it was now felt a more formal activity amongst the young people, particularly the boys, was called for and a representative from the Boy's Brigade came in November. This visit was obviously fruitful as the recruitment night held in February 1960 was reported to have been 'quite successful'.

1960 sees the first report I have found of outsiders being allowed to use the car park, something that has brought financial benefit but also, the minutes show, considerable heartache over the years. The 'ALIVE WITH GOD' visitation continued throughout the year, Life Boys was started in the April and thoughts turned to the formation of a Girl's Brigade Company. Obviously, in this year, Epsom Baptist Church was seeking to reach out to the whole community in the name of our Lord Jesus.

One can only assume that the lack of willingness of others to allow their names to go forward for deacons' elections was causing some concern at this time and some discussion took place. Whilst it was not felt appropriate to follow the practice of some churches and limit the time a deacon can serve without a break, it was decided that no mention would be made of the willingness of retiring deacons to stand for re-election when nominations were called for. This decision does not appear to have been enshrined in the Church Rules.

Progress in the work amongst young people appears to have been mixed in that whilst the Girl's Life Brigade held a recruitment evening towards the end of the year the Life Boys was closed having been in existence for only a few months. That was not all, Mr Sharpe indicated in the September that, the church having grown, he could no longer cope with the task on a part-time basis and he therefore tendered notice of termination of his pastorate to take effect from 31st March 1961. Because of this, steps were instituted to obtain possession of the Manse in Bridge Road.

CHAPTER 4: THE 60's AND THE 70's

It seems that 1961 was not to be the easiest of years. At an early stage there were difficulties within the leadership of the Boy's Brigade, these it seems were to rumble on for some considerable time and sadly despite continuing efforts the Life Boys had not been revived. This was, however, eventually achieved. Mr Sharpe's farewell meeting took place on the 5th April thus bringing to an end what he was to describe as one of the happiest periods in his life. A Moderator, Rev S.J. Dewhurst was appointed in March but in April Rev A.E. Alien accepted the invitation to the Pastorate and his induction was to take place on the 23rd

September. On the property front, possession of the Manse was not obtained until late in the year as the outgoing tenant had considerable difficulties in finding alternative accommodation and a developer expressed interest in acquiring the church site. Dealing with all these matters must have been very time consuming.

I had not realised that up until this point in time lady members were not eligible for nomination as deacons but this situation was reversed in September 1961. However, although I have not researched it closely, I think it is some years before the first lady deacon is elected. At around this time, as a comparatively young Christian, I well remember wondering what all the fuss was about when the church to which I then belonged expressed grave concern at the coming of Premium Bonds, particular as, being a bank clerk I was expected to sell them. Epsom and Ewell Council of Churches took a similar line over bingo and resisted strongly the use of the Baths Hall in East Street Epsom for this purpose. Looking back I have to admit that I now feel both amused and somewhat sad that much time and energy was spent on such matters when we should all have been spreading the Gospel. I fully realise some of you will not agree with me.

There is no doubt whatsoever that property and land considerations have taken up a great number of man-hours in the life of our Church and 1962 is no exception. In this year thoughts definitely turned to the possibility of moving to a different site, the road widening was a possibility, if only a remote one, but suitable land was difficult, if not impossible, to find. At one stage a possible site was found in Temple Road but for one reason or another, nothing was to come of it. Discussions do seem to have gone on for a considerable time however. Sadly, both the Boys Brigade and the Life Boys were still having difficulties over leadership and/or numbers but all was not difficulty and problems.

I have previously told you that EBC has seen several called to fulltime service for the Lord and at this time David Greengrass was accepted for training for the Ministry at London Bible College. It is sobering to realise that the Baptist Hymn Books that we still use today were first purchased nearly 40 years ago in October 1962. Perhaps we need to come more up-to-date!

With the new year, pressures over the site were not to abate. In the January the Evangelical Church approached us with a view to a joint effort to reserve the Free Church site on the new Longmead Estate but it was not felt that we should agree to take that step. However, in March, a three month option was obtained on 18, Church Street with a view to building a new church there. At a Special Church Meeting in April it was agreed that outline planning permission be applied for for a church building seating 3/400. The application was indeed made but was rejected by the Council and although an appeal was lodged and was to drag on for another 12 months, this too came to nought.

It must not be thought that all the time was spent on such matters because obviously it was not. The Sunday School in Pound Lane was still in being and in March 1963 a Church Conference was held which was judged to have been very worthwhile. The three main conclusions appear to have been the need for greater emphasis on prayer (this comes up too often to be purely coincidental, is God pointing out one of our failings?), a call to experiment with guest night services and to review the monthly 'Sunday Night at 8' meetings. I believe the latter were originally envisaged as a means of reaching out rather than just of an 'internal' nature. 1963 also saw the first record of a complaint concerning unauthorised parking in the church car park that I have detected.

During the first half of 1964 the ongoing problems within the leadership of the Boy's Brigade were finally solved and a recruitment campaign was undertaken. Yet another developer expressed interest in our land and consideration was given to a proposal that the Church might occupy the first floor of a new office block. Thankfully this was rejected. On the spiritual front, it was proposed to link with the Anniversary a brief convention for the deepening of the Spiritual life of the Church.

Once again feelers came from the Evangelical Church who stated that if a new site was found they would, perhaps, come in with us but it seems that at this stage thoughts were more along the lines of rebuilding where we are rather than moving on. The idea was put forward that a new church be built on the Hall site with the present church building becoming the hall until the road widening came about. I assume that this was the reason the land behind the Hall was purchased for £1850 in October 1965.

I will now deal with the next five years fairly briefly and will split property considerations from other activities.

1967 saw what appears to have been the first of several Sunday School Holiday Bible Clubs held for one week in March. Plans were laid for a pilot scheme of house-to-house evangelism and a coach party was arranged for a visit to the "All Britain Crusade". Bearing in mind our current relationships with other Epsom churches, it is perhaps strange to read that in some quarters within the membership, at this time, there was concern expressed regarding our reticence in our ecumenical relationships. It was in this year also that yet another of our folk went forward for fulltime service; David Kemp was accepted as a student at Cliff College.

Jumping now to 1970, this was the year which saw the founding of the Church Play Group which was to run until 1996 when it was to close in somewhat difficult circumstances. In February a retreat was held, this was split into three sessions: The meaning of mission to us - The motive for mission - Method of mission. So the Church was still seeking to reach out despite the many distractions. It is reported that the Junior Boy's Brigade now numbered 50 and that work amongst the young was to be helped by the conversion of the kitchen in the church building to a coffee bar. In this year also, a Young Wives' Club was formed.

The saga of the site and the premises continued throughout this period. During 1966 there was the possible opportunity of acquiring land in Upper High Street and this was pursued during 1967. However, in September 1967, whilst the Council gave some encouragement regarding this site, they indicated that they felt planning permission for any development on our current

site was unlikely. In January 1968 the Council gave definite indications as to how much of the Church Street site they would want in connection with the road widening scheme. In light of this and the fact that it was deemed that the remaining land would be insufficient for our purposes the Council were asked to buy the whole site and find us a new home. This new home could well have been in West Hill on the site of West Hill House but the scheme proposed by the Council fell through in September 1970 because of the preservation order on West Hill House. July 1970 saw an offer for the site in the sum of £70,000 but the possibility of a new home was still in the air and the year closed with the Church awaiting news on both the road widening and, now, the Southern Link Road.

It seems that for some time there had been strains within the leadership team and in July 1970 Mr Allen announced that he was moving to Horsham. A Moderator was appointed in September.

1971 proved to be a rather difficult year in more than one aspect of Church life. The ever present threat to the church building and/or the site itself continued. The saga of the site and the many plans that seem to have been made by the local Council could fill a book on its own but suffice it to say that this year saw no less than three separate offers to purchase the site one of which incorporated the possibility of an alternative site for the church in The Parade. Epsom Council also confirmed that Church Street would be widened but also informed the Church that the current site was zoned 'residential' and not 'commercial' which was not a helpful development. Towards the end of the year the possibility arose of perhaps sharing with the Roman Catholic Church a site on the Longmead Estate on which they had an option.

The second problem area was the work amongst the young people and it is evident that there were differences of opinion on how this should be handled. There were problems too with staffing in the Boy's and Girl's Brigade Companies and so far as the BB was concerned there was the possibility that this could collapse.

During 1971 the search for a new Pastor went on and 1972 opened on a positive note in that Rev John Tall accepted the call and his induction was to take place on 15th April. Added to this, Derek Hobson applied to the All Nations Christian College for missionary training and the Church agreed to give financial support.

On the premises front, negotiations were still continuing but the Church was now faced not only with the loss of the church and some land for the widening of Church Street but also, now, by the resurrection of the Southern Link Road. News also came that the Roman Catholic Church would not be taking up their option on the Longmead site and thoughts turned as to its suitability as a new home for EBC on its own but there appears to have been little enthusiasm for this option. As the year passed the pace of the negotiations appears to have quickened with alternative sites in both The Parade and Laburnum Road being mooted. Back in the first half of 1971 the old Manse in Bridge Road had been sold for £7,950 and with the coming of Mr Tall a new property, 55, Hazon Way, was acquired,

Bearing in mind all the above, the year must have been a somewhat tense one and the situation couldn't be helped by the continuing threat to the future of the Boy's Brigade Company coupled with continuing concern regarding the work amongst the young people in general and the lack of rapport between the young and the rest of the church. Perhaps due, at least in part, to all this the Pastor suffered a period of ill health but he was able to give time to considering the future and towards the end of the year put forward his thoughts on Sunday Services, Outreach and Circle.

Obviously the situation did not improve as the Church moved into the new year and the final outcome of the tensions was the resignation of the Leaders of the Young Peoples' work halfway through 1973 with a new team being appointed in the September in time for the new session. Sadly, too, due to lack of numbers, it was decided to close the Pound Lane Sunday School thus bringing to an end a work of 'outreach' that had lasted for some 28 years.

However, EBC was not completely inward-looking. The Church agreed to meet with the United Reformed Church and the Methodist Church to see how far they work together. It seems that little came of this initiative as perhaps the other two had thoughts of closer links than those envisaged by the Baptists. At the same time some of the Epsom churches were joining together for a visitation to the new Longmead Estate and EBC agreed to play their part.

The year appears to have closed on a quite positive note in that a Church Conference was held in the September and deemed a success. Negotiations re the site were continuing and thoughts were turning to extending The Manse in some way, either by building an extension or carrying out a loft conversion.

By early 1974 the lack of sufficient leaders for the Boy's Brigade brought about the demise of that organisation at EBC. The boys were not altogether lost as the Company combined with that at the URC with the hope, I think, that our own might be revived in the future. Sadly this was not to be. On the positive side the staff of the Church's Play Group were led to start a Mothers' and Toddlers' Club which soon became quite successful. Planning for the extension at The Manse reached its final stages in that planning permission was applied for but thoughts then turned to buying a larger property. In October 1974 the present house at 3, Avenue Road was purchased.

The new year would see the Church celebrating its 75th Anniversary and in October 1974 detailed planning got under way whilst on the 'outreach' front an Evangelism Committee was formed.

Obviously 1975 was a significant year in the life of the Church even though it was apparently not without tension and some discontent. The year opened with an interdenominational civic service in the January but it has been difficult to identify quite what was done during the year as the detailed planning was carried out by a sub-committee and only minimal records appear to

be available. It is clear however that a day of prayer was held on the 4th January, a flower festival at Easter, a stall may have been taken at the Borough Show in August and the Church Anniversary itself took place in October.

I have referred before to the remark made by Rev Peskett back in 1920 when he is noted as saying, ""... they wanted to be in sympathy with young people and to avoid giving them the impression that the Christian religion was gloomy and stuffy". In this anniversary year the youth group expressed the desire to include country and barn-dancing in their programme. This seems to have been reluctantly agreed to by the Church with the following comment: "Meeting confirmed its acceptance subject to the activity not being thrown open to outsiders and subject to a responsible oversight by the leaders, It would always be referred to as country dancing or barn-dancing". Somewhat Victorian? What's in a name anyway? Perhaps not surprisingly leadership difficulties for the work with young people were to continue coupled with the need to find a new Captain for the Girl's Brigade.

By this time the author was beginning to feel somewhat jagged in that minutes are not the most interesting documents to read. I am sure that once again I am wrong to place any real significance on the fact that my notes indicate little for me to write about for the next year or two. Much hard work in many aspects of Church life must have taken place. 1976 saw efforts being made to form a Men's Meeting and these were to continue until they were finally abandoned towards the end of 1979. 1976/17 saw gypsies encamped on the land adjacent to the church and the last family were to leave in April 1977. The Church had made efforts to help them in practical ways and it is good to read that that last family expressed their deep gratitude for all that had been done for them.

Dare I mention the Car Park? For many years the arrangements for outsiders, particularly University Motors, to use this facility had been on an informal basis but thoughts now turned to putting the agreement on a more formal footing, Problems had been seen in the past and formal agreements were eventually drawn up and signed. What difference this made to the difficulties is not minuted but most of you will be aware of what has gone on over the years in connection with this thorny problem,

You will remember that the organ had been purchased from St George's Chapel, Windsor and it now stood in need of overhaul. This work was put in hand but, if I have understood the situation correctly, was to drag on for a very long time. In any event, as you will see, the instrument was to be replaced within a few years,

The question of dancing was to again rear its head in 1978 when the young people wanted to raise funds by holding a 'sponsored dance'. In line with previous thinking they were asked to think again as the Church would prefer a more responsible and helpful method of raising money. It was after all to include ballroom, modern and free-dancing in addition to barn dancing and musical movement!!

Nothing is new! In that same year much time seems to have been spent in dealing with further problems with the car park. At the same time Mr Tall raised his concerns regarding: "...a deeper malaise which is subtly but surely gripping us, deacons and members alike". In view of the latter a Church Conference was called but I have been unable to find any record of the outcome, At least, having identified the problem steps were immediately taken to seek God's guidance as to what must be done. 1978 also saw the very real danger of the Church's finances going into deficit but it seems that Church and Congregation responded to the need.

For several years EBC had been the owners of a mini-bus which appears to have been well used. New regulations were to make it difficult for the Church to continue in this but a member took the vehicle into private hands and it was to continue to be available into the future.

Bearing in mind the fact that it is only a matter of 3 months or so from the time this is being written that the heating pipes in the church have been replaced, it is startling to read that as far back as 1979 a new heating system was considered as a priority, The church building was apparently in need of re-decoration and it was felt that the heating system I woodworm treatment and re-wiring should be dealt with before this was carried out.

CHAPTER 5: THE LAST TWENTY.

One of the features of the interior of the church building is the Cross above the baptistry doors behind the pulpit. It was at the very start of the new decade that the Church Meeting finally agreed on the size and design, the work was put in hand and we see and admire the final result today. Sadly, the heating was causing problems but the ever present threat of the building of the new road caused the Church Meeting to defer consideration of any long-term remedial action. The Local Council were predicting that the church building would be demolished as part of their plans and appear to have forecast that this would take place anytime from 1988 onwards, perhaps into the 90's.

Mr. Tall wrote a series of articles, on healing, in the Baptist Times and at one stage there was consideration given to the holding of 'healing services' at EBC. The records don't mention any reference to these actually taking place but both teaching on healing and prayer meetings in small groups did take place. It was, however, in 1980 that Dr Russell, the General Secretary of the Baptist Union, issued the 'Call to Commitment' to the denomination. It was interesting to read the thoughts of some at the time and to recognise the echoes that still exist today.

The need for immediate commitment.

The need for more prayer in the church.

People don't always see the link between commitment to Christ and commitment to the Church.

The need for more young couples.

90% of members not involved apart from Sunday worship. The problem of unresponsive congregations. The church will only be right when individuals are right in their relationship with God.

As you will already have appreciated, the ever present threat to the church building had brought about a quite justified reluctance to spend money on the premises. However, in 1980 both woodworm and dry rot were discovered in parts of the church building and these had to be attended to and treated. At the same time it was realised that the interior required re-decoration and the church was fortunate to be able to enrol the help of some Christian students from Cambridge so that this could be accomplished. By all accounts their visit was a great experience on both sides and it is reported that from the students' point of view they had been very appreciative of their welcome and the hospitality they had enjoyed. In addition they had been stimulated by sharing in the life of the church. Following re-decoration it was agreed to purchase new carpet and new curtains for the sanctuary, presumably those that still grace the building today.

Early in 1981 Mr Tall was approached by the Baptist Times to work for them on the basis of one day a week. In the previous year, during his sabbatical, he had spent time working for that paper. In September of the previous year the church had enthusiastically confirmed its participation in 'Partnership Mission 1981' which was planned for twelve months time. A long discussion took place at the January Church Meeting when it was emphasised that this would entail a commitment by every church member and in view of the fact that not all members were present it was decided that a letter would be circulated giving full details. Sadly, the response was insufficient to justify continuing with the project and the Church withdrew. It was however felt that the exercise had been worthwhile as it had brought to light matters for prayer and discussion.

1981 also saw the beginning of the occasional Sunday lunches for those living alone, these did of course continue until quite recently.

Throughout this story the dreaded 'ROAD' keeps rearing its head although, of course, it is forever in the background. Despite what had been said barely a year before it was now reported that Surrey CC Highways Department was not in favour of the Link Road and this obviously only added to the on-going uncertainty.

Following withdrawal from 'Partnership Mission 1981' the question of the church's out reach to Epsom was carefully considered but no radical suggestions appear to have been made. However, during the year an Evangelism Committee was formed so obviously outreach was very much in the minds of some. In November, due to the generosity of two members, the distribution of Challenge commenced and, at least in part, this has continued until the present day. 1982 closed on a sad note. In September Mr Tall tendered his resignation to take effect from early December as he had felt called to become a fulltime member of the team at the Baptist Times. His was the second longest pastorate in the history of the church at that stage. The departure of Mr Tall could have meant a long interregnum as can happen on occasions when there is a change of Minister. However this was not to be the case on this occasion as it was in April 1983 that Peter Lewis heard God's call to the pastorate and he was inducted in the July of that year.

It is good to read in the minutes that at this time in the history of EBC the Youth Group was thriving with a well planned published programme. Outreach too was very much to the fore in that the church agreed to participate in Mission to London, the meetings to be held at Wimbledon in the autumn and then at the ground of Queen's Park Rangers in the following spring. It is not clear to what extent the church as a whole became involved but one member did become a regional organiser which entailed having contact with churches throughout SW London and organising meetings in Epsom for representatives from the churches. Two or three other members undertook the job of Counsellor. At least one coach party went to Wimbledon and it is known that the Mission was a significant turning point in the life of one man, that surely must still be remembered with rejoicing.

When researching the past it is quite often the case that the same subjects come to the forefront time and again. Towards the end of 1983 Mr Lewis expressed concern that it was difficult for the congregation to see the actual act of baptism due to the siting of the baptistry. That same subject is, at the time of writing, once again under consideration. Similarly, some felt that those who attended Mission to London might find worship in local churches much less alive and felt the need for EBC to look objectively at its own evening service with its empty pews and, to quote, "pathetic singing". Reference was also made of the need for the 'joy of salvation', particularly among the young people. This surely is still the case and not only among the young. At this stage in the life of the Church, Church Meetings were held on a monthly basis. The suggestion was put forward that the business side be restricted, perhaps to half an hour, to give time for discussion on such matters as outreach, the functions of the church, what we would like to do on Sundays. A good suggestion?

The new year, 1984, saw continuing participation in Mission to London and the appointment of Peter Lewis as Free Church Chaplain at Horton Hospital, a position he continued to fill for many years. Attempts were also made to draw Play Group parents into the activities of the church and also to the Mission to London coach party (or parties) that had been arranged. No record appears to have been made as to what success was achieved. As I write this the heating system in the church building is in the process of being replaced and it is interesting to read that in this year of 1984 the old system was indeed condemned due to a leak that could not be repaired. Presumably a way was found because there was still a great, and justifiable, reluctance to spend money on the premises due to the threat of the road. A new proposal could have seen the church incorporated in an office development, this was resisted, but as the possibility of a new building seemed to be increasing, thoughts, by the end of the year, turned to what form this might take.

For some considerable time the difficulties in finding leaders to assist the Girl's Brigade Captain had been causing concern and numbers had, it seems, been falling. In the July, very reluctantly, the decision was made to close the Brigade Company and to form a new junior youth group called the Yo-Yo Club. Thus the church finally lost its last uniformed organisation. On a different front, attendance at mid-week devotional meetings was disappointing and consideration was given, at one stage, to holding daytime meetings.

As the year of 1985 opened, both outreach through a possible Mission in 1986 as proposed by the Epsom and District Council for Evangelism and the holding of 'healing' services were under very active consideration. The Mission was to be held by Eric Delve and Dr Tuckwell had agreed to speak at an evening service on the question of healing. It was in this year that the practice of The Bible being brought into the church a few minutes before the commencement of the service and also the Quiet Meditation being read were instituted. The object of this was to encourage the congregation to concentrate their thoughts thereon. I leave you to judge as to whether it still achieves that object.

Epsom Baptist Church has the reputation of giving visitors a warm welcome, in every sense. On the physical side this must be partly due to the new boiler which was installed in 1985 and is presumably the one that still keeps the congregation warm today and has now been incorporated into the new system. What happened to the leak that could not be repaired which I referred to earlier is not clear but presumably it had been dealt with satisfactorily as the basic system lasted until 1999.

Towards the end of 1985 concern was expressed of the work amongst young people, the situation having changed considerably over a period of two years. Comments had been made from various quarters, including parents, concerning the form of worship at EBC comparing it with the 'attractions' of the Fellowship of the King. Thus the Church was faced with the challenge, the challenge faced and dealt with in differing ways by so many churches up and down the land, of the Charismatic Movement. It was suggested that the Minister and Deacons should visit the Fellowship of the King to see what was attracting our young people but I found no evidence as to whether this visit took place or the result of any subsequent discussions. As the worship today is still very traditional in its format then one can only assume that it was decided to take no action.

Prayer is a vital part of our Faith and I don't suppose that I am alone in being aware that I do not spend enough time in prayer either alone or together with others. This seems to have been the feeling of at least some towards the end of 1985 as there were encouraging signs that prayer groups were developing and the experiment of splitting into groups for 15 minutes prior to Church Meetings was apparently tried.

The start of 1986 seems to have had its problems although the year did open with the installation of new amplification equipment. Presumably this was the system which was replaced in 1999 so it served well even though it had its problems, at least in later years. Questions over the site became more and more pressing during the first half of the year, there was on going difficulty over unauthorised use of the car park, damage to the organ and the church piano due to the improved heating in the church and the threat of closure hanging over the youth group. As we now know, it would be many years before the site question would be resolved and the car park difficulties would be a continuing problem almost indefinitely. Repair of the organ would have cost almost as much as the purchase of a new electronic instrument and the one we enjoy today was installed in July of this year.

The second half of the year was brighter. Somebody suggested that a party from the Church should attend Spring Harvest in 1987 and a small party did attend. News of the Youth Group seems to have improved, although some concern was still being expressed, and the Yo - Yo Group was flourishing. Apparently as many as 48 children had attended meetings. Oh! that that was the case today. The Church was invited to participate in a Town Mission and the suggestion was made that the Deacons should meet in retreat to deal with spiritual issues, pray together, think together, to plan for the future, to assess targets etc. The first of these was held in February 1987 and was apparently deemed a helpful success.

It would obviously be wrong to conclude that nothing happened over the next two years because I am sure that much hard work was done but I have not picked up many significant facts from the minutes. Sadly, in 1987 some of the young people decided to move to both the United Reformed Church and the Tattenham Corner Evangelical Church, their gain and our loss. It seems too that the older age group of young people had, in the main, departed as the Yo-yo? Youth Group was now catering for two age ranges, i.e. 5 - 9 years and 10+ years. On the other side of the coin, however, it appears that sufficient numbers were attending mid-week meetings to make it possible to invite outside speakers. A series of Autumn Studies were arranged to be led by tutors from Spurgeon's College.

Towards the end of 1988 both the need for clearer aims in the prayer life of the Church and questions over the form our worship should take came to the fore. With regard to the latter, the Worship Committee arranged for a questionnaire to be circulated and it seems that 40+ people responded but, sadly, no details of the results are recorded.

1989 reveals concerns regarding the Sunday School and it seems that perhaps there were concerns about where the Church as a whole was going as a survey was carried out. The questions seek information concerning the individual both in respect of their background and their faith, the support they give to the church community and their thoughts on EBC including the form of worship. This was in line with what was being done in many churches within the Baptist Denomination. So far as the Sunday School was concerned, the staff met with the Deacons to consider where the School was going, the need for staff and the content of the Sunday School.

It must not be felt that during this period EBC was only involved in its internal affairs, something that can so easily happen. Billy Graham held his Mission 89 in this year and some of the members attended the Discovery Group Leaders Course and became

involved in the 'follow up' process. Some 8 children from the Church had gone to Earls Court for one of the meetings. The process of reaching out was taking place. Discussion of the results of the survey appears to have been postponed several times and in the end, whilst report was made to the Church Meeting in early 1990, no specific recommendations or resolutions appear to have been forthcoming. 1989 closed with the Church being reminded that the dead hand of the Link Road was still very much hanging over them.

The health of the Church as a whole seems to have been causing concern in the hearts and minds of some and it was felt that there were happenings and broken relationships from the past which were holding the Church back. God grants but he also withholds. Very real steps were taken and burdens were lifted.

Sadly, 1990 saw the closure of the Yo-Yo Club due to lack of leaders and work amongst the children was concentrated in the new 2 hour sessions of Adventurers on Sunday mornings. The survey carried out in the previous year was under the auspices of AIM and consideration was now given to AIM 2. Considerable discussion appears to have taken place along the following lines:

- Many churches are small, many have been small and have grown.
- The need for training must be stressed.
- Publicity can and should be given to baptismal services.
- Friendship brings people into churches.
- The need for training for the 'Person to Person' situation.

Quite what developed from all this is not altogether clear but it seems that 'Person to Person' was still being pursued in March 1991 and visitation of a small area of the Town took place in the July. Some useful contacts, it is reported, were made. In October 1990 definite indications were forthcoming that the new road would be built, starting in 1993, and thoughts had to definitely turn to what form a new building should take. Over following months much discussion seems to have taken place and other churches were visited. The suggestion was even made that EBC should join with the Methodist Church in new premises and approaches along these lines were made but, it seems, did not develop. In May 1991 a possible site for the new church building in West Hill was identified and it certainly appeared that at last the whole question of premises was well on the way to being resolved.

It is good to read that despite all the distractions over premises and the worries over the general health of the Church outreach was not forgotten. As previously written, the visitation took place in July and to this can be added the individual effort by one member who helped drive a relief lorry to Romania. (He did, in fact, go more than once.) The Iron Curtain had of course recently fallen and there was great need and poverty in Eastern Europe. The year closed with plans being laid for the holding of meetings under the name, 'Nutcracker Group' with the theme 'Discovering the Faith'. In a similar vein the Deacons Retreat for 1992 would have the title 'Building up the Church' and it was agreed to acquire copies of "Songs of Fellowship" to assist in the worship of the Church. These were in fact donated by two much loved members.

1992 saw concern being expressed over the Church finances in that the last accounts had shown a deficit. Similarly there were worries over the future availability of human resources if new and younger people were not brought into the fellowship. Once again the need for prayer was emphasised together with consultation with the younger element in the Church to consider the whole matter. The need for discussion to develop thinking regarding the Sunday evening services was also recognised. Again, on the rather negative side, in May concern was expressed at the disappointing attendance at the 'Nutcracker' meetings. It seems to have taken a little time for concern to be converted into action but by the end of the year discussions were in hand regarding the formation of a 'think-tank' and encouraging signs were mentioned. There was a nucleus of younger children, contacts were being made with Play Group parents and it was felt there was a better spirit of prayer. However, there was no 'work' amongst young people and it was felt that a sub-committee could give thought as to the direction in which the Church should go in the future and how to reach out to the community.

Over all the above still hung the threat of the 'ROAD' but in early 1993 came the news that this was likely to be cancelled and in fact it was said to have been abandoned for an indefinite period. Out of the debates that took place towards the end of 1992 the Weaknesses and Strengths Committee was formed and submitted its report in May. I think it right to devote space to some of what came out of their deliberations which I now do.

STRENGTHS:

- Friendly and welcoming.
- Preaching well received.
- Some delightful individual Christians valued for their prayerfulness and faithfulness.

A note of caution was, however, expressed in the following terms:

- Love can become sentimental if not based on the love of Jesus.
- Enjoyment of 'fellowship' can become inward looking and prevent the Church from fulfilling Jesus' commission to "lift up our eyes and look on the fields" (Matt 9) and "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel" (Mark 16).

WEAKNESSES:

- Absence of young people since the core of enthusiastic youngsters left some years previously.
- One or two younger folk had been coming but were put off by coldness and unresponsiveness.
- An apparent lack of interest in prayer in that only small numbers attend prayer meetings.

The following suggestions were made:

- A Day of Prayer and the formation of Prayer Triplets.
- More formal Bible Study.
- Prayer and praise evenings at regular intervals.

I did not find any specific record of what developed from all the above but of course prayer triplets were formed some of which are still in being today. The Committee was to go on to consider 'Opportunities and Threats' but again nothing specific seems to have developed. 1993 closed on one very positive note and one rather negative one. It was suggested that in November 94 the Church should hold a 'New Vision' Weekend but it was also stated that the 'ROAD' project was not finally dead so the threat to our premises still continued.

1994 saw individuals within EBC becoming closely involved with 'On Fire 94', a nation-wide campaign organised in Epsom by Churches Together. Detailed planning for the 'New Vision' Weekend commenced in the February thus indicating a continuing leading towards looking to the future. November saw the Weekend itself take place and in retrospect some spoke of blessing and challenge whilst others apparently felt that it wasn't quite their scene. The author met with Jesus in a very real way helped greatly by the fact we hosted two of the Team in our home and I can testify to this day of the change it made in my life. My faith came alive in a new way and, glad to say, has continued to the present time. Gathering with one another is not just a chance to meet with one another but is a time when we should meet with Jesus, praise him openly and freely, join in prayer and hear from his Word.

Sadly, very little appeared to change once the Team departed although two members opened their home on a regular basis for prayer.

During the latter part of 1994 relationships with the leadership of the Play Group became difficult and this was to rumble on. Whilst the threat of the 'ROAD' had not yet disappeared it was agreed that basic repairs and improvements were justified and in line with this decision the kitchen in the Hall was refitted and a debt is owed to those members who worked extremely hard to bring this about. On the down side, the disruption caused did not help with relationships with the Play Group although the source of the difficulties went much deeper than that. The whole situation came to a head towards the end of the summer term and the decision was made in June that the Play Group must close. Thus, the Church lost a very precious asset and a work that had continued for some 14 years. It was to be early 1996 before all the ramifications were to be settled although the scars remain today.

The new year saw the Deacons meeting in retreat to seek God's leading as to the future, their deliberations were to include the following:

- Have we lost momentum after the 'high' of 'New Vision'?
- The need for commitment to prayer.
- Are there divisions within the fellowship?
- The importance of Church Meetings.
- Where does God want us to go ?

It was during 1996 that the movement within the Town against almost any improvements to the road system to ease the increasing congestion really got under way. In May it was announced that there would be a public consultation on the whole subject. By this time the Relief Road had become a purely Epsom affair, the County having dropped out. The Council also put forward a scheme to open up the Town Hall car park to the public and also to use the land adjacent to the Church for a public car park. This would involve them acquiring a small portion of the Church's land to the rear of the Hall. Those of you who have visited EBC in recent times will have seen the end result although this was only completed in 1999 and not in 1997 as originally envisaged due, at least in part, to the intervention of so called 'Eco - Warriors'.

Notwithstanding these concerns, which could so easily have caused the Church to only look inwards on itself, the call to reach out was not ignored. It was agreed by the Church Meeting to hold a letter campaign covering, progressively, as much of the Town as we could and this was to continue for over a year. Each letter was to be enveloped and addressed personally to an individual or to a family unit, the delivery was to take place on a specific day and at a specific time with prayer support from a synchronised prayer meeting at the church. Those distributing the letters and those gathering to pray were to meet beforehand at the church at the agreed time to worship and to prepare themselves in prayer. Sadly, despite a lot of hard work by some, little response from those receiving the letters was seen and perhaps a greater commitment by the Church and congregation had been needed.

It was not only to the Town of Epsom that EBC looked out as in 1996 it was agreed that the thank offering would be for the benefit of Monks Orchard Baptist Church who were seeking finance for a new (their first) building and also the London City Mission.

Outreach continued in 1997 and whilst some encouraging early results are recorded in the January it was not found possible to build on or to develop them further. The Church has always supported the Churches Together in Epsom leaflet distribution at both Easter and Christmas and on this occasion it was felt right to issue a leaflet of our own at Easter as a development in the letter scheme which was still on-going. 1000 such leaflets were delivered. Again, no specific results apparently came from this effort and indeed following the Easter deliveries a heartfelt appeal was made for greater prayer support during the future, planned, letter distributions.

Although the planning application for the car park access road was put back, those advising the Church recommended that the matter of compensation should be given careful consideration and surely all who have seen the end result can only agree that the benefits have far outweighed any disadvantages. In line with the decision made back in 1994 concerning property repairs and renewals, the thank-offering was devoted to providing funds for renovation to the Bannister Room and the Russell Room (rooms at the rear of the Hall) together with further help to Monks Orchard for their building project.

1997 closed with the decision to hold an Alpha Course in early 1998 and also to undertake a survey of the members of Church and Congregation with a view to finding out how they saw the present state of the Church and also the future.

The new year opened with three members organising a highly successful exhibit detailing something of the history of the Church and its current activities at an exhibition arranged by Churches Together in Epsom. Later in the year a land exchange was agreed with the Council in connection with their car park scheme. It also became more and more obvious that the Relief Road was a dead duck and that, perhaps, at last, the ever present threat to the site was to be lifted. In light of this and following the renovation of both the Bannister and Russell Rooms thoughts turned to the church building itself. Could the windows be replaced? The pews replaced by chairs? The sanctuary be fully carpeted? The pulpit I platform extended and modernised? Toilet facilities provided adjacent to the sanctuary? A new foyer installed? A new heating system provided? (The latter was felt unnecessary but as mentioned earlier events proved the contrary to be the case.) Some of the thoughts were far beyond what would prove feasible or even prudent but by the time you read this the interior will look much improved after the enforced neglect of too many years.

Again, not all the time and effort were taken up with worldly matters such as land, premises and finance. The spiritual needs of both the Fellowship and the Town were not forgotten. The results of the survey were analysed and given thought, following this the congregation was to be approached to see what changes, if any, might be made to the Sunday services. The Deacons spent time at their Retreat considering 'Signs of a Healthy Church' based on Acts ch2 v42-47, signs that thoughts were turning to the need for change. Later in the year the suggestion was made that a Church party might be organised to attend Spring Harvest 99 and that consideration be given to replacing the Baptist Hymn Book with Baptist Praise and Worship. It was increasingly found that visiting preachers were choosing hymns and songs not known by the congregation and it was proposed that each month a new one would be learnt. Sadly, as so often in the past, little, if anything, came of all this. A general offer from the new LBA Association Superintendent to London churches was issued offering "Encouragement Weekends" but again this did not find favour. However, on a more positive note it was agreed that a small and dedicated team should, in the name of the Church, undertake a pilot visitation taking the 'Jesus Video' to a small area of homes in the Town.

The Church was started in April 1900 and so we now enter upon the 100th year of its life so far. The year opened on two similar notes, the health of the church - the building, and the health of the Church - the people. In January the Deacons met to discuss what renovations and renewals might realistically be carried out in preparation for the Centenary Celebrations in October 2000. At the same time it was proposed that the Church should participate in the 'Making Sunday Best' health check. Planning for the 'Jesus Video' visitation also progressed and this took place in the April. Whilst the results were not startling some response was received, sufficient to encourage continuation. By the autumn the team had joined with the Epsom Christian Fellowship and thus this became a joint effort and at the time of writing this 'witness' continues.

Much prayer time over the recent years had been devoted to seeking God's guidance as to the future and it would seem that in 1999 those prayers were being answered. The BU Issued 'A Plan for Reform' included in which were '5 Core values' for churches:-

- A prophetic community.
- An inclusive community.
- A sacrificial community.
- A missionary community. ' ...
- A worshipping community:

It was agreed that the Church would devote time to considering them and then would adopt them.

Reference has previously been made to the state of the windows in the church building and in May an estimate was finally accepted for their replacement. Back in 1998 the need to replace the heating system as part and parcel of the overall renovation plans was not recognised but, perhaps fortunately, a greater power, or perhaps just fate, intervened in that a substantial leak in the system became apparent necessitating complete renewal of the piping and radiators. Again, on the premises front, many had been concerned and saddened that since the demise of the Church's own Play Group the suite of buildings owned by the Church had been so little used. An application by a Nursery currently based at Christ Church to have use of the Hall was joyfully received and by the time you read this history they should be well installed. The premises will once again echo to the voices of little children and there will be opportunity to find ways of witnessing to the mums.

For two or three years four Sundays had been set aside as Missionary Sundays in order that world-wide mission might feature in the Church's calendar. With the new 'clustering' under which EBC was linked with Stoneleigh Baptist and Worcester Park Baptist Churches the opportunity arose to become part of the BMS 'Link-Up' Scheme and to be linked with Simon and Karen Collins in Angola. The Church were delighted to accept as Stan and Maureen Porter, onetime members of EBC, and much loved, had retired from service with the BMS in Brazil. At the same time the Church adopted Geoff Horswood, the grandson of the Church Treasurer, who was on the mission field in Kazakhstan with YWAM.

The process of 'self examination' was to continue in September with a visit from the Head of the Department for Research and Training in Mission at the BU. He had been invited to come as the trend towards an ever ageing membership and a steady decline in membership was continuing to cause concern. He was to meet with the Deacons again early in 2000. What is to come from this process and all the reflection that took place in this final year of the history so far is yet to be seen.

My task is done. It is a great sadness to me that Henrietta Gilchrist will not see the end result as without her encouragement I doubt that I would have persevered. I have tried to keep an open mind in my researches and in the writing and I apologise for any significant omissions I may have made. I am sure there are some.

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DEDICATION

To all those good Christian friends we have left behind at EBC and miss so much.